

**Confirmation 2020-21**  
**Session 2 – Canon**  
**September 20, 2020**

You may have heard the word "canon" before, but as far as the Bible goes, it is not a long-barreled weapon on two wheels. That is a cannon with two n's. The canon that I am referring to is defined at Dictionary.com, definition 6 as, "the books of the Bible recognized by any Christian church as genuine and inspired." I would agree with that definition to a point.

You may know that what many people refer to as the Catholic Bible, contains several books that Jews and Protestants do not accept as canon. Those books are called *apocrypha* or *apocryphal books*. Apocrypha originally meant *hidden* or *secret writings*, but today the apocrypha is used to describe these books of questionable value to the church. You will not find them in your Lutheran Study Bible.

We don't often use the word canon, often simply referring to the Bible as the Bible. The Bible is an amazing collection of writings of many types of literature, written by many people and brought together over thousands of years, all to tell one grand story about who God is and who we are in relationship to God. We carelessly call these unique documents books even though they are compiled together into one book called the Bible.

In the Model Constitution of the ELCA, it states, "This congregation accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life." (ELCA Model Constitution. C2.03.) These words set us apart from many other Christian bodies, such as the evangelicals and fundamentalists that believe that the Bible is the *inerrant* word of God, meaning that the Bible contains no errors. However, the fact is, God nor Jesus Christ ever wrote a single word of scripture but did inspire others to write what the Bible contains. Did they always get divine inspiration exactly right? Could there have been a selfish influence? Over

the thousands of years when the contents of the Bible was copied by hand by other people, could they have made errors? Being that the Bible has been translated into other languages hundreds of times, how well does the translation capture what God or Jesus Christ said? These are all fascinating questions to ponder. We ELCA Lutheran Christians are content to say that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is present in the written words of the Bible. God breathes into us, through us, even comes among us in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Bible didn't just fall from the sky as a gift from God, but instead emerged up from the ground through real human beings in real human places. God inspires in a kind of grassroots way, and that makes the process a lot messier. People argue and fight, and keep arguing and fighting. The Bible is the text that bears witness to this. God is at work amid our humanity to bring life and salvation to the world. And that means the Bible opens up into our lives too. We get invited in because God still inspires.

### **What you need to know**

The Bible was written by human beings. It wasn't handed directly from heaven to earth as the one bound book as you know today. People wrote it in a specific place and times, in certain languages, and at key moments in history. We take the Bible seriously when we pay attention not only to what it says, but also to who wrote it, and when and where. This study of the context of scripture is so important that it has its own name, *sitz im leben*, a German expression that means *the setting in life*. When we consider the *sitz im leben*, scripture comes alive and better informs and potentially influences our lives.

The Bible includes many types of literature, by many authors. Bound into one great book are family stories, histories, songs of praise, cries of lament, prophecy, proverbs, existential crises, love poetry, biographies, letters, and grand metaphoric narratives about beasts and wheels and the total renewal of the world at the end of time.

However, the heart of the story is the same at its core. The Bible is a collection of voices, like many streams coming together in a single river. They come from different times and places, but they all have the same end: to tell the story of God and why it matters for the world.

Inspiration didn't stop with the Bible, and it doesn't stop with us either. God breathes into the text and through the text into us. But that goes two ways. We breathe out through the text and into the world in a way that leads us to participate in God's inspiration. The Bible is therefore a dynamic and living tradition of God's inspired word and God's inspired people, who are called to inspire the world with the living of their lives of discipleship. And that includes all of us – no matter the age, or whether we are confirmed yet or not.

Each student of confirmation will be given a Lutheran Study Bible, a bookmark that is an easy reference to the Bible's contents and page numbers, and a copy of Luther's Small Catechism. I would encourage you to keep the bookmark and Luther's Small Catechism in your Bible for ready reference.

### **About the Lutheran Study Bible (LSB)**

The Lutheran Study Bible (LSB) is not a confirmation Bible or a youth-oriented Bible. Such things exist, but they are not as good as the Lutheran Study Bible. A quick skim through the pages will reveal that there are timelines, maps, charts and figures, interesting detail about the Bible, introductions to each book or letter that detail the background, story, and message, and much more.

Turn to page 129. Pause this recording until you get there.

If you are on page 129, then you are in the book of Exodus, chapter 4, beginning at verse 1. The LSB uses a large blue typeface to indicate major headings. This particular heading is, "Moses' Miraculous Power." Each book is divided up into chapters indicated by the large blue numbers, and verses indicated by the smaller black numbers. When a verse begins a

paragraph, such as verse 6, the number is as big as the letters. But when a verse is in the middle of a paragraph, like verse 7 for example, the 7 is superscript, or slightly smaller and elevated.

Back to verse 6, notice the word "leprous" has a tiny blue superscript lowercase *a*. This is called an annotation, and it directs our attention to the bottom of the page where the same blue superscript "*a*" offers more information. In this case, the superscript "*a*" indicates that "leprous" is "a term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain." So annotations help to illustrate the biblical text.

Look at the right column of the same page, page 129. This column on all pages of scripture in the LSB contains study notes, helpful insight, concepts, Lutheran perspectives, and faith reflections that will enhance understanding and further thinking. If all this looks unfamiliar to you, that is because all versions of the Bible, even all versions of the Bible of the same translation, can be presented differently. But I think the LSB is one of the best versions I've ever used. That is why I chose it for you. Keep it, use it, and cherish it and it will provide inspiration and meaning your whole lifelong. Since we already described the Bible as the inspired word of God, we should expect that it will continue to inspire us as long as we allow it to.

The book you have in your hands that we call the Bible is the product of centuries of debate and discussion and controversy. *Canonization* is the process that scripture has gone through by sinful human beings that brought the one book we call the Bible into being. Though sinful human beings were involved, the Holy Spirit was also involved and Christians have to believe that its contents are what God wants us to know about God's self and how we are to live within God's Kingdom.

If you haven't opened a Bible before, open it now and look through it. We will eventually, ever so briefly, skim through it entirely during Confirmation class, along with Luther's Small Catechism. However, there is no way our brief glance will do much more than expose you to its contents. Becoming more familiar with it and its contents are really up to

you – in the same way that the decision to "confirm" the Christian faith as your own happens on the Day of Confirmation. So become familiar with it. Use it for your own personal devotions. There is a Guide to Personal Bible Reading on page 1553, and a Reading Plan to give structure to your devotional reading on page 2081. I would encourage you to begin there. Don't take on too much or you might get frustrated. Just begin doing something, and read the annotations and the study helps and you will begin to enjoy the Bible.

## **Essay Questions**

*In 100-150 of your own words, answer three of the following essay questions and return them to Pastor Jesse by email at [pastor@zionohio.org](mailto:pastor@zionohio.org) no later than next Sunday, September 27.*

1. Describe what the Bible is and what you hope it becomes for you.
2. Explain the difference between the "inerrant word of God" and the "inspired word of God." Use other illustrations to make your point if you want to.
3. Write what you know about the Bible, and what would you like to know about the Bible.
4. How do we know that the right books were chosen to be canonized, included in the Bible?
5. What does "inspired" mean?
6. Is God still speaking to the world today, or is the Bible God's final word?